

Theological Foundations for Youth Ministry
Center for Youth Ministry Training & Memphis Theological Seminary
Fall Semester, 2009 – 2010

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Dates/Times: Tuesday, August 4 – Thursday, August 6 (1-5 PM)
Thursdsday, September 24 – Saturday, September 26 (TBD)
Tuesday, November 3 – Thursday, November 5 (TBD)

Description: This course has been developed using the practical theological framework envisaged by Richard R. Osmer in *Practical Theology: An Introduction* wherein he identifies four tasks of practical theological reflection: descriptive-empirical, interpretive, normative, and pragmatic. Seen as a hermeneutical circle, each of these moments of practical theology sheds light on the others and work together to form “more faithful” action in the church and society. The framework for this course is evidenced in its title: *Theological Foundations for Youth Ministry*.

First, this course is designed to assess various normative lenses through which one understands the *theological foundations* for ministry with young people. With a shared understanding that our theological commitments do (and should) give shape to our ministry with young people (whether we consciously acknowledge it or not), we will examine various theological starting points for conceiving youth ministry. As an outcome of the course, students will develop their own theological rationale for youth ministry.

Second, this course will engage the social sciences with an eye towards understanding the sociological and psychological development of *youth* identity and comprehending the historical development of adolescence. Students will be asked to reflect on their personal spiritual autobiography in conversation with developmental theorists discussed in the course.

Finally, this is a course focused on *ministry* with young people. It is a primary commitment of the teaching team that youth ministry is ultimately about the spiritual formation of young people – and that this is ultimately God’s work, not ours. At the same time, it is our hope that this course encourages you to develop practical insight into ministry with young people regardless of whether you will serve as full-time youth ministers, pastors, academics, teachers, parents, or faithful friends.

In the end, as Kenda Dean notes, Christianity is not about *what* but *whom*. Likewise, youth ministry is not about *what* but *who* – who young people are, who we are as leaders, pastors, and teachers, and who God is in the midst of the messiness of their lives and ours. It is our hope that this course not only informs *what* you do as leaders in youth ministry, but that it ultimately shapes *who* you are – as pastors, teachers, leaders, and followers of Christ.

Learning Outcomes: As a result of having taken this course students will be able to demonstrate several basic competencies in Youth Ministry. In particular students will be able to do the following:

1. Articulate a basic understanding of practical theology and identify youth ministry within this broad framework.
2. Identify and understand key turning points in the historical development of adolescence.
3. Bring theoretical understanding of adolescent psychological and spiritual development into conversation with the lived experience of adolescents.
4. Develop a vision for youth ministry built on theological foundations emerging from one's particular context and commitments.
5. Exhibit core competency in the practice of youth ministry focused on the spiritual formation of adolescents.

Structure: The class will meet in plenary sessions over the course of 3 retreats scheduled in advance by CYMT. It is expected that you will come to the retreats with the assigned reading completed as plenary sessions will often draw on course readings and will utilize readings in a variety of learning activities. Precept discussions (held every other week with a mentor) will be assigned in the first week and will meet as scheduled. Precepts will include (varyingly) book discussion, case studies, and final paper prospectus review and discussion.

Requirements:

Class & Precept Attendance and Participation The teaching team is committed to the development of a learning community that fosters authenticity and trust. In order to accomplish this goal, students and teachers alike must become full participants in the educational process. Group discussions (precepts) will be held on a bi-weekly basis and will involve discussion around required readings and lectures. Students are asked to prepare for each discussion group by reading the required text and writing three provocative questions for group discussion. Please see the attached “question writing guide” for guidance on good question writing. Also, during the final two discussion groups, students will be asked to present a brief “paper prospectus” on your final paper for feedback and input from your group and precept leader.

Reading Reflection Papers Each student will write *two* 2-3 page theological reflection papers on books covered in class. The responses are to be critical, theological reflections on two works in Practical Theology/Youth Ministry. The first reflection paper is due on October 5th; the second is due on November 13th. Choose from 2 of the following books: Dean, *Practicing Passion*; Root, *Revisiting Relational Youth Ministry*; Arthur, *The God-Hungry Imagination*, Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers*; Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*; Twenge, *Generation Me*.

Mid-term Assignment (Due October 24 @ 3PM). Each student will write a 10 page paper recounting your personal spiritual autobiography, paying particular attention to “turning points” in your spiritual development from puberty through young adulthood. This story is to be written “in conversation” with Fowler’s *Stages of Faith* and one other developmental theorist of your choice (i.e. Kegan, Erickson, Kohlberg, Piaget, etc.). This can be a theorist covered in class or someone else that you have been exposed to in previous coursework.

This is to be a narrative account of your journey, and can take many creative forms. The essence of the assignment is placing your story in conversation with the theory we are learning in class – where does your story uphold the theory? Where does it challenge it? **You will not be graded on your story.** You will be graded on how well you recognize key components of developmental theory coming up as you recount your own spiritual development.

Examples:

- Use journal entries from three or four “turning points” on your spiritual journey; Imagine a conversation between Fowler and Kegan regarding your story.
- Write a narrative account of your spiritual journey. Use extensive footnotes to point to ways your story interacts with/challenges/upholds developmental theory.

Final Paper (Due Thursday, December 10, 2010 via e-mail to instructor) A structured 10-12 page vision for youth ministry, guided by your understanding of how a doctrine drawn from your particular theological heritage can guide youth ministry that authentically addresses adolescents in a particular context. Reminder: your theological heritage is broader than a denomination (but includes your denomination).

More information to follow...

Grading:

Retreat & Precept participation (5%)

Reflection Papers (10% each)

Mid-term examination (30%)

Case study report (45%)

Academic Misconduct Policy: All students are expected to do their own work and to properly document source materials used. Plagiarism, multiple submissions, inadequate citation, etc. will result in automatic failure of the course with no credit granted, and the case will be referred to the Student and Academic Affairs Committee for disciplinary action. Please refer to the MTS Handbook for terms, definitions, and institutional policies related to academic misconduct.

Late Paper Policy: 1/2 grade per day will be deducted for late papers. Requests for extension beyond term time must be arranged in advance with the Instructor.

Required Books:

Arthur, Sarah. *The God-Hungry Imagination: The Art of Storytelling for Postmodern Youth Ministry.*

Dean, Kenda. *Practicing Passion: Youth and the Quest for a Passionate Church*

Fowler, James. *Stages of Faith.*

Kroger, Jane. *Identity in Adolescence: The Balance Between Self and Other*

Root, Andrew. *Revisiting Relational Youth Ministry: From a Strategy of Influence to a Theology of Incarnation*

One of the following (that you haven't read):

Arnett, Jeffrey. *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties*

Twenge, Jean. *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled – And Miserable Than Ever Before.*

Wuthnow, Robert. *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty and Thirty-Somethings are Shaping the Future of American Religion.*

DISCUSSION GROUP SCHEDULE:

Date	Discussion Topic (In addition to required reading)	Reading Covered	Assignments
August 27	Emerging Adulthood	Twenge, <i>Generation Me</i> or Wuthnow, <i>After the Baby Boomers</i> or Arnett, <i>Emerging Adulthood</i>	
Sept. 10	Adolescent Development	Kroger, <i>Identity in Adolescence</i>	
Oct. 1	Adolescent Development and Spiritual Formation	Fowler, <i>Stages of Faith</i>	
Oct. 15	Incarnational Ministry	Root, <i>Revisiting Relational Ministry</i>	
Oct. 29	Final Paper Preparation	Dean, <i>Practicing Passion</i>	Final Paper Prospectus – 1-page outline/description of your proposed final paper topic
Nov. 19	Final Paper Preparation	Arthur, <i>The God-Hungry Imagination</i>	